

**DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY**

**COMPLETE STATEMENT**

**OF**

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ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF THE ARMY (CIVIL WORKS)**

**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**ON**

**FEDERAL RESPONSE TO THE RECENT OIL SPILL  
IN THE GULF OF MEXICO**

**May 18, 2010**

## **Introduction**

Madam Chairman and other Members of the Subcommittee, I am Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works). Thank you for the opportunity to be here today to discuss the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' (Corps) ongoing efforts to support the national emergency oil spill response in Coastal Louisiana and assessment of impacts to navigation. In the midst of a national emergency response to the tragic Deepwater Horizon oil spill, the Corps of Engineers continues to provide reliable navigation on the river systems and waterways along the Gulf coast as it maintains vigilant monitoring and assessment of the oil impacts. In addition, the Corps has provided modeling support for river discharges and is prepared to support emergency permitting under Section 404 and Section 10 authorities of a proposed barrier plan developed at the local level to prevent the oil from reaching the coastal wetlands. The Corps has also reviewed and provided input to an interim Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 6 Oil Solidifier Policy and supports its implementation.

## **Navigation Assessment**

Currently, the oil spill is not affecting dredging operations or navigation in any rivers or waterways along the Gulf. So far there have been no incidences of deep-draft vessels getting oil on their hulls as they approach the southwest pass on the Mississippi River. The U.S. Coast Guard, working with navigation interests, has established cleaning stations in the Lower Mississippi River to for cleaning those vessels before they proceed up the River to New Orleans, similar to what was done in the 2009 Mississippi River oil spill. The Corps continues daily monitoring of any impacts to navigation and dredging operations as a result of the oil spill and maintains continued coordination with navigation interests and appropriate agencies.

## **Modification of Mississippi River Flows**

The Corps New Orleans District, Mississippi Valley Division, and the Engineer Research and Development Center Coastal and Hydraulics Laboratory have analyzed a number of water management conditions and possible actions to determine whether we could modify river flows to keep oil away from the mouth of the Mississippi River and key wetlands on either side of the River. This analysis included possible deviations from the statutory 70/30 split at the Old River Control Structure between the Mississippi River and the Atchafalaya Basin. Numerical modeling analysis has shown that diverting water from the Atchafalaya Basin to the Mississippi River at the Old River Control structure would have minimal influence on the movement of the oil in the Mississippi River Delta region. Due to the extreme flooding of the Tennessee and Cumberland basins early this month, Mississippi River discharges below New Orleans will nearly double. However, even with these forecasted increases in discharge we do not anticipate these increased flows to be sufficient to allow opening the Bonnet Carre' spillway to reduce oil entering the Mississippi Sound area. With respect to the smaller freshwater diversion structures, those structures are currently operating near design capacity and the modeling suggests that this may help retard the movement of oil into

the project marshes from the marsh/open water boundaries. This team continues to evaluate other water management scenarios to determine if they will help address the oil spill issues.

### **Participation in baseline sediment sampling**

The Corps Engineering Research and Development Center is also working with the United States Geological Survey program to collect and analyze baseline sediment samples in the wetlands and navigation areas. These pre-oil spill samples will provide critical comparisons to post-emergency sediments that will be required for efforts to continue with Louisiana coastal restoration through the beneficial uses of dredged material.

### **Assistance to the state plan for barrier islands**

On May 11, 2010, the Corps received a permit request from the State of Louisiana for the construction of an approximately 100 mile long barrier intended to intercept the oil before it enters the marshes. It appears to be based on a Dutch concept that was modified by officials from Plaquemines Parish. At this point the Corps' only role in that plan is a permit review under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. A contractor for Plaquemines Parish has developed the concept, identified potential material borrow sites and coordinated with the dredging industry nationwide to develop options to build this system of barriers using British Petroleum funding. The New Orleans District met with local resource agencies on May 12, 2010, to discuss the permit request with the goal of providing an initial response to the request by Friday May 14, 2010. The District has also met with representatives of the dredging industry at their request and has provided technical assistance as they prepare for the potential dredging needs. The Corps continues to coordinate with the Council on Environmental Quality and other appropriate federal and state resource agencies to participate and explore ways to facilitate this action if it moves forward.

### **Engineer Research and Development Center (ERDC) Support**

In addition to ERDC Coastal and Hydraulics Laboratory support, seven people have deployed from the ERDC Environmental Laboratory to support U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) activities. Activities include, but are not limited to, providing expert NRDA strategy development, development of bird injury study plans, global positioning systems collection and integration of field data, primary GIS and mapping support.

ERDC stands ready to assist in the development of a common operating picture for the multi-agency oil spill response. As the Department of Army lead for environmental restoration research and development, ERDC is prepared to assist in formulating and implementing strategies for long-term monitoring and remediation of wetland and barrier island areas affected by the oil spill.

**Conclusion**

This concludes my testimony, Madam Chairman. Again, thank you for allowing me to testify on the ongoing efforts of the Corps of Engineers in response to the oil spill. I will be happy to answer any questions you or the other Members of the Committee may have.